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SUMMARY

OF THE

PRINCIPAL EVIDENCES

FOR THE

TRUTH AND DIVINE ORIGIN

OF THE

CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

DESIGNED CHIEFLY

FOR THE USE OF YOUNG PERSONS;

More particularly of thoſe who have lately been confirmed in

THE DIOCESE OF LONDON.

BY BEILBY, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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PREFACE.

FOR Readers of a mature age and judgment, there are ſo many excellent Treatiſes on the Evidences of the Chriſtian Religion already publiſhed, that it is perfectly needleſs to add to their number; but it appeared to me, that there was ſtill wanting ſomething in a ſhorter, a cheaper, a more methodical and familiar form, for thoſe who have juſt received Confirmation. This ſeems to be the propereſt period for communicating to young people the chief grounds of their faith, and laying the foundations of a firm belief in the Chriſtian Revelation; leaving it to themſelves to add to theſe primary evidences which reaſon furniſhes in favour of Chriſtianity, thoſe further proofs of its truth, which I truſt they will hereafter

derive from ſtill higher and better ſources; from an intimate acquaintance with the Sacred Writings; from the illuminating and ſanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit upon their underſtandings and their hearts; and from the experimental conviction, which I hope they will hereafter have, of the divine efficacy of the Goſpel in purifying their affections, in remedying the diſorders of their corrupt nature, and in communicating to them thoſe two invaluable bleſſings, Peace of Conſcience, and Holineſs of Life.

In a concern of ſuch infinite importance, no ſpecies of evidence ought to be diſcouraged, depreciated, or withheld. And at this time more particularly, when new Compendiums of Infidelity, and new Libels on Chriſtianity are diſperſed continually, with indefatigable induſtry, through every part of the kingdom, and every claſs of the community,* it ſeems highly expedient to meet theſe hoſtile attempts with publications of

* See the Report of the Committee of the Houſe of Lords, reſpecting Treaſonable Societies, &c.

1795

of an oppoſite tendency, and to fortify the minds of thoſe who are juſt entering into the world, by plain and conciſe ſtatements of the principal arguments in favour of Chriſtianity, againſt the efforts that will be made to miſlead their judgments, corrupt their principles, and ſhake their belief in the Goſpel of Chriſt.

WITH a view therefore of fulfilling this duty towards the youth more immediately under my care, I have drawn up the following little Tract, for the uſe of thoſe principally who have been lately confirmed in the Dioceſe of London. My chief object has been to collect together into one view, and to compreſs together in a narrow compaſs, all the moſt forcible arguments for the truth of our religion, which are to be found in our beſt writers, with the addition of ſuch obſervations of my own as occurred to me in the proſecution of the Work. All theſe I have claſſed under a few ſhort, clear, diſtinct Propoſitions; an arrangement which I have always found moſt convenient for the inſtruction of youth, and beſt calculated to aſſiſt their memories, to make ſtrong and

and durable impreſſions on their underſtandings, and to render the important truths of religion moſt eaſy to be comprehended and retained in their minds. After this, I would recommend it to my young Readers, as they advance in life, to have recourſe to one or more of the well-known Treatiſes of Grotius, Addiſon, Clarke, Leſlie, Lardner, Beattie, and Paley, on the Evidences of Chriſtianity; to ſome of whom I am myſelf much indebted, and to whoſe maſterly writings on that ſubject, this little Work was meant only as a kind of elementary introduction.

I MUST however warn my young diſciples, that when they have, by the courſe of reading here ſuggeſted, arrived at a full conviction of the Divine Origin of the Chriſtian Religion, they muſt not imagine that their taſk is finiſhed, and that nothing more is required at their hands. The moſt important part of their buſineſs ſtill remains to be accompliſhed. After being ſatisfied that the Chriſtian Religion comes from God, their next ſtep is to enquire carefully what that religion is, what the doctrines are which it requires to be believed, and what the duties which it requires

quires to be performed. For this purpoſe it may be uſeful for them to begin with Gaſtrell's Chriſtian Inſtitutes, and Archbiſhop Secker's Lectures on the Church Catechiſm. In the firſt they will find the Doctrines and Duties of the Chriſtian Religion ranged under their proper heads in the very words of Scripture, and in the other they will ſee moſt of them clearly and conciſely explained by a moſt able, pious, and judicious divine. After this they may proceed to ſtudy the Scriptures themſelves, and more particularly the New Teſtament, with the aſſiſtance of Dr. Doddridge's Family Expoſitor, to which they ſhould add ſome of the Sermons of our beſt divines, Biſhop Taylor, Barrow, Sherlock and Secker.

WHEN they have thus learnt what Chriſtianity is, and what it demands from them, they will feel it to be their indiſpenſable duty (as it is unqueſtionably their trueſt intereſt) to believe implicitly all the doctrines, and obey with cheerfulneſs all the commands of their Maker and Redeemer; to ſacrifice to them, and to their own future eternal welfare, all their corrupt paſſions and

and irregular desires, to preserve themselves unspotted from the world, and to implore the assistance of Divine Grace, co-operating with their own most earnest endeavours, to render their belief in the Gospel effectual to the sanctification of their hearts, the regulation of their lives, and the salvation of their souls.

I HAVE only to add, that although this little Treatise is designed principally for the instruction of Youth, yet considered as a kind of recapitulation of the Evidences of Christianity, it may be found of some use to persons of a more mature age, by refreshing their memories, and bringing back to their recollection those proofs of their religion, which they have formerly read in larger and more elaborate works, and which they will here see brought together into one point of view.

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THE method I intend to purſue in this Treatiſe, is to preſent to my young Readers the following ſeries of Propoſitions, and then to prove diſtinctly the truth of each.

I. FROM conſidering the ſtate of the heathen world, before the appearance of our Lord upon earth, it is evident that there was an abſolute neceſſity for a revelation of God's will, and, of

courſe, a great probability before hand that ſuch a revelation would be granted.

II. At the very time when there was a general expectation in the world of ſome extraordinary perſonage making his appearance in it, a perſon called Jeſus Chriſt did actually appear upon earth, aſſerting that he was the ſon of God, and that he was ſent from heaven to teach mankind true religion; and he did accordingly found a religion, which from him was called the Chriſtian Religion, and which has been profeſſed by great numbers of people from that time to the preſent.

III. The books of the New Teſtament were written by thoſe perſons to whom they are aſcribed, and contain a faithful hiſtory of Chriſt and his religion: and the account there given of both, may be ſecurely relied upon as ſtrictly true.

IV. The

IV. THE ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament (which are connected with thoſe of the New) are the genuine writings of thoſe whoſe names they bear, and give a true account of the Moſaic diſpenſation, of the hiſtorical facts, the divine commands, the moral precepts, and the prophecies which they contain.

V. THE character of Chriſt, as repreſented in the goſpels, affords very ſtrong ground for believing that he was a divine perſon.

VI. THE ſublimity of his doctrines and the purity of his moral precepts confirm this belief.

VII. THE rapid and ſucceſsful propagation of the goſpel by the firſt teachers of it, through a large part of the world, is a proof that they

were favoured with divine aſſiſtance and ſupport.

VIII. A compariſon betwixt Chriſt and Mahomet and their reſpective religions, leads us to conclude, that as the religion of the latter was confeſſedly the invention of man, that of the former was derived from God.

IX. THE predictions delivered by the ancient prophets, and fulfilled in our Saviour, ſhow that he was the Meſſiah expected by the Jews, and that he came into the world by divine appointment, to be the great deliverer and redeemer of mankind.

X. THE prophecies delivered by our Saviour himſelf, prove that he was endued with the foreknowledge of future events, which belongs

belongs only to God and to thoſe inſpired by him.

XI. THE miracles performed by our Lord, demonſtrate him to have poſſeſſed divine power.

XII. THE reſurrection of our Lord from the dead, is a fact fully proved by the cleareſt evidence, and is the ſeal and confirmation of his divinity and of the truth of his religion.

THESE are the ſeveral points I ſhall undertake to prove in the following pages: and if theſe are clearly made out, there can be nothing more wanting to ſatisfy every reaſonable man, that the Chriſtian Religion is a true revelation from God.

PROPOSITION I.

FROM CONSIDERING THE STATE OF THE HEATHEN WORLD, BEFORE THE APPEARANCE OF OUR LORD UPON EARTH, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THERE WAS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY FOR A DIVINE REVELATION OF GOD'S WILL, AND, OF COURSE, A GREAT PROBABILITY BEFOREHAND, THAT SUCH A REVELATION WOULD BE GRANTED.

THEY who are acquainted with ancient hiſtory, know perfectly well that there is no one fact more certain and more notorious than this: That for many ages before our Saviour appeared upon earth, and at the time he actually did appear, the whole heathen world, even the politeſt and moſt civilized, and moſt learned nations, were, with a very few exceptions, ſunk in the moſt deplorable ignorance of every thing relating to God and to religion; in the

groſſeſt ſuperſtition and idolatry, and in the moſt abominable corruption and depravity of manners. They neither underſtood the true nature of God, nor the attributes and perfections which belong to him, nor the worſhip that was acceptable to him, nor the moral duties which he required from his creatures; nor had they any clear notions or firm belief of the immortality of the ſoul, and a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments in another life. They believed the world to be under the direction of a vaſt multitude of gods and goddeſſes, to whom they aſcribed the worſt paſſions and the worſt vices that ever diſgraced human nature. They worſhipped alſo dead men and women, birds and beaſts, inſects and reptiles, (eſpecially that moſt odious and diſguſting reptile the ſerpent) together with an infinite number of idols, the work of their own hands, from various materials, gold, ſilver, wood, and ſtone. With re-

ſpect to their own conduct, they were almoſt univerſally addicted to the moſt ſhocking and abominable vices; even many of their ſolemn religious ceremonies and acts of devotion were ſcenes of the groſſeſt ſenſuality and licentiouſneſs. Others of them were attended with the moſt ſavage and cruel ſuperſtitions, and ſometimes even with human ſacrifices.

THE deſcription given of the ancient Pagans by St. Paul, in the firſt chapter of his epiſtle to the Romans, is ſtrictly and literally true.—"They were filled with all unrighteouſneſs, fornication, wickedneſs, covetouſneſs, uncleanneſs, maliciouſneſs, full of envy; murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whiſperers, backbiters, haters of God, deſpiteful, proud, boaſters, inventors of evil things, diſobedient to parents, without underſtanding, covenant breakers, without natural affections, implacable, unmerciful."

THESE

THESE are not the mere general declamations of a pious man againſt the wickedneſs of the times; they are faithful and exact pictures of the manners of the age, and they are fully and amply confirmed by contemporary heathen writers. They are applied alſo to a people, highly civilized, ingenious, learned, and celebrated for their proficiency in all liberal arts and ſciences. What, then, muſt have been the depravity of the moſt barbarous nations, when ſuch were the morals of the moſt polite and virtuous?

THERE were, it is true, among all the ancient nations, and eſpecially among the Greeks and Romans, ſome wiſe and comparatively good men, called philoſophers, who had juſter notions of morality and religion than the reſt of the world, and preſerved themſelves to a certain degree unpolluted by the general corruption of

the times. But theſe were few in proportion to the great bulk of mankind, and were utterly unable to produce any conſiderable change in the prevailing principles and manners of their countrymen. They themſelves had but very imperfect and erroneous notions reſpecting the nature and attributes of God, the worſhip he required, the duties and obligations of morality, the method of God's governing the world, his deſign in creating mankind, the original dignity of human nature, the ſtate of corruption and depravity into which it afterwards fell; the particular mode of divine interpoſition neceſſary for the recovery of the human race; the means of regaining the favour of their offended Maker, and the glorious end to which God intended finally to conduct them. Even with reſpect to thoſe great and important doctrines abovementioned, the immortality of the ſoul, the reality of a future ſtate, and the diſtribution of

rewards

rewards and puniſhments hereafter, they were full of doubt, uncertainty, and heſitation; and rather ardently wiſhed and hoped for, than confidently expected and believed them. But even what they *did* know with any degree of clearneſs and certainty, they either would not condeſcend, or wanted the ability, to render plain and intelligible to the lower orders of the people. They were deſtitute alſo of proper authority to enforce the virtues they recommended; they had no motives to propoſe powerful enough to overrule ſtrong temptations and corrupt inclinations: their own example, inſtead of recommending their precepts, tended to counteract them; for it was generally (even in the very beſt of them) in direct oppoſition to their doctrines; and the deteſtable vices to which many of them were addicted, entirely deſtroyed the efficacy of what they taught.

ABOVE all, they were deſtitute of thoſe awful ſanctions of religion, which are the moſt effectual reſtraints on the paſſions and vices of mankind, and the moſt powerful incentives to virtue, the rewards and puniſhments of a future ſtate, which form ſo eſſential and important a part of the Chriſtian diſpenſation.

THERE was therefore a plain and abſolute neceſſity for a divine revelation, to reſcue mankind from that gulph of ignorance, ſuperſtition, idolatry, wickedneſs, and miſery, in which they were almoſt univerſally ſunk; to teach them in what manner, and with what kind of external ſervice, God might moſt acceptably be worſhipped, and what expiation he would accept for ſin; to give them a full aſſurance of a future ſtate and a future judgment; to make the whole doctrine of religion clear and obvious to all capacities; to add

add weight and authority to the plaineſt precepts, and to furniſh men with extraordinary and ſupernatural aſſiſtance, to enable them to overcome the corruptions of their nature. And ſince it was alſo plainly worthy of God, and conſonant to all our ideas of his goodneſs, mercy, and compaſſion to the work of his own hands, that he ſhould thus enlighten, and aſſiſt, and direct the creatures he had made, there was evidently much ground to expect that ſuch information and aſſiſtance would be granted; and the wiſeſt of the ancient heathens themſelves thought it moſt natural and agreeable to right reaſon to hope for ſomething of this nature.

You may give over, ſays Socrates, all hopes of amending men's manners for the future, unleſs God be pleaſed to ſend you ſome other perſon to inſtruct you*; and Plato declares, that whatever

* Plato in Apolog. Socratis.

whatever is right, and as it ſhould be in the preſent evil ſtate of the world, can be ſo only by the *particular interpoſition of God*.* Cicero has made ſimilar declarations; and Porphyry, who was a moſt inveterate enemy to the Chriſtian religion, yet confeſſes, that there was wanting *ſome univerſal method of delivering men's ſouls, which no ſect of philoſophy had ever yet found out*.†

THESE confeſſions of the great ſages of antiquity, infinitely outweigh the aſſertions of our modern infidels, "that human reaſon is fully ſufficient to teach man his duty, and enable him to perform it; and that, therefore, a divine revelation was perfectly needleſs." It is true, that, in the preſent times, a Deiſt may have tolerably juſt notions of the nature and attributes of the Supreme

* Plato de Rep.

† Auguſtin. de Civitate Dei, l. 10. c. 32.

Supreme Being, of the worſhip due to him, of the ground and extent of moral obligation, and even of a future ſtate of retribution. But from whence does he derive theſe notions? Not from the dictates of his own unaſſiſted reaſon, but (as the philoſophiſt Rouſſeau himſelf confeſſes *) from thoſe very ſcriptures which he deſpiſes and reviles, from the early impreſſions of education, from living and converſing in a Chriſtian country, where thoſe doctrines are publicly taught, and where, in ſpite of himſelf, he imbibes ſome portion of that religious knowledge which the ſacred writings have every where diffuſed and communicated to the *enemies* as well as the friends of the goſpel. But they who were deſtitute of theſe advantages, they who had nothing but reaſon to direct them, and therefore knew what reaſon is capable of doing, when left to itſelf, much better than any modern infidel

* Vol. ix. p. 71, 12mo. 1764.

infidel (who never was, and never can be, preciſely in the ſame predicament); theſe men uniformly declare, that the mere light of nature was *not* competent to conduct them into the road of happineſs and virtue; and that the only *ſure and certain guide* to carry men well through this life *was a divine diſcovery of the truth*.* Theſe conſiderations may ſerve to ſhew, that, inſtead of entertaining any unreaſonable prejudices beforehand againſt the poſſibility or probability of any divine revelation whatever, we ought, on the contrary, to be previouſly prepoſſeſſed in favour of it, and to be prepared and open to receive it with candour and fairneſs, whenever it ſhould come ſupported with ſufficient evidence; becauſe, from conſidering the wants of man and the mercy of God, it appears highly probable that ſuch a revelation would *ſome time or other* be vouchſafed to mankind.

* Plato in Phædone.

PROPOSITION II.

AT THE VERY TIME WHEN THERE WAS A GENERAL EXPECTATION IN THE WORLD OF SOME EXTRAORDINARY PERSONAGE MAKING HIS APPEARANCE IN IT, A PERSON CALLED JESUS CHRIST DID ACTUALLY APPEAR UPON EARTH, ASSERTING THAT HE WAS THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT HE CAME FROM HEAVEN TO TEACH MANKIND TRUE RELIGION; AND HE DID ACCORDINGLY FOUND A RELIGION, WHICH FROM HIM WAS CALLED, THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, AND WHICH HAS BEEN PROFESSED BY GREAT NUMBERS OF PEOPLE FROM THAT TIME TO THE PEESENT.

IT was neceſſary juſt to ſtate this Propoſition, as the foundation of all the reaſoning that is to follow: but the truth of it is ſo univerſally acknowledged, that it requires but very few words to be ſaid in ſupport of it.

THAT

THAT there was, about the time of our Saviour's birth, a general expectation ſpread over the eaſtern part of the world, that ſome very extraordinary perſon would appear in Judæa, is evident both from the ſacred hiſtory and from Pagan writers. St. Matthew informs us, that when Jeſus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, there came wiſe men (probably men of conſiderable rank and learning in their own country) from the Eaſt, ſaying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews; for we have ſeen his ſtar in the Eaſt, and are come to worſhip him?" In confirmation of this, two Roman hiſtorians, Suetonius and Tacitus, aſſert, that there prevailed at that time, over the whole Eaſt, an ancient and fixed opinion, that there ſhould ariſe out of Judæa a perſon who ſhould obtain dominion over the world.

THAT at this time, when Auguſtus Cæſar was

was emperor of Rome, a perſon called Jeſus Chriſt was actually born in Judæa; that he profeſſed to come from heaven to teach mankind true religion, and that he had a multitude of followers; the ſacred hiſtorians unanimouſly affirm, and ſeveral heathen authors alſo bear teſtimony to the ſame facts. They mention the very name of Chriſt, and acknowledge that he had a great number of diſciples, who from him were called Chriſtians. The Jews, though profeſſed enemies to our religion, acknowledge theſe things to be true; and none even of the earlieſt Pagans who wrote againſt Chriſtianity, ever pretended to queſtion their reality. Theſe things, therefore, are as certain and undeniable as ancient hiſtory, both ſacred and profane, and the concurrent teſtimony both of friends and enemies, can poſſibly make them.

PROPOSITION III.

THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WERE WRITTEN BY THOSE PERSONS TO WHOM THEY ARE ASCRIBED, AND CONTAIN A FAITHFUL HISTORY OF CHRIST AND HIS RELIGION: AND THE ACCOUNT THERE GIVEN OF BOTH, MAY BE SECURELY RELIED UPON AS STRICTLY TRUE.

THE books which contain the hiſtory of Chriſt and of the Chriſtian religion, are the four Goſpels and the Acts of the Apoſtles. That the Goſpels were written by the perſons whoſe names they bear, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there is no more reaſon to doubt, than that the hiſtories which we have under the names of Xenophon, Livy, or Tacitus, were written by thoſe authors.

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A GREAT many paſſages are alluded to or quoted from the Evangeliſts, exactly as we read them now, by a regular ſucceſſion of Chriſtian writers, from the time of the Apoſtles down to this hour; and at a very early period their names are mentioned as the authors of their reſpective goſpels; which is more than can be ſaid for any other ancient hiſtorian whatever.*

THESE books have always been conſidered by the whole Chriſtian world, from the Apoſtolic age, as containing a faithful hiſtory of their religion, and therefore they ought to be received as ſuch; juſt as we allow the Koran to contain a genuine account of the Mahometan religion, and the ſacred books of the Bramins to contain a true repreſentation of the Hindoo religion.

THAT

* Lardner's Credibility, b. i. and Paley's Evidences, vol. i.

THAT all the facts related in these writings, and the accounts given of every thing our Saviour said and did, are also strictly true, we have the most substantial grounds for believing:

FOR, in the first place, the writers had the very best means of information, and could not possibly be deceived themselves.

AND, in the next place, they could have no conceivable inducement for imposing upon others.

St. Matthew and St. John were two of our Lord's Apostles; his constant companions and attendants throughout the whole of his ministry. They were actually present at the scenes which they describe; eye-witnesses of the facts, and ear-witnesses of the discourses, which they relate.

St. Mark and St. Luke, though not themſelves Apoſtles, yet were the contemporaries and companions of Apoſtles, and in habits of ſociety and friendſhip with thoſe who had been preſent at the tranſactions which they record. St. Luke expreſsly ſays this in the beginning of his goſpel, which opens with theſe words: "For as much as many have taken in hand to ſet forth in order a declaration of thoſe things which are moſt ſurely believed amongſt us: even as *they* delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were *eye-witneſſes and miniſters of the word*, it ſeemed good to *me* alſo, *having had perfect underſtanding of all things from the very firſt*, to write unto thee, in order, moſt excellent Theophilus, that thou mighteſt know the *certainty* of thoſe things wherein thou haſt been inſtructed." St. Luke alſo being the author of the Acts of the Apoſtles, we have, for the writers of theſe five books, perſons who had the moſt *perfect knowledge* of every

every thing they relate, either from their own perſonal obſervation, or from immediate communications with thoſe who ſaw and heard every thing that paſſed.

THEY could not, therefore, be themſelves deceived; nor could they have the leaſt inducement, or the leaſt inclination, to deceive others.

THEY were plain, honeſt, artleſs, unlearned men, in very humble occupations of life, and utterly incapable of inventing or carrying on ſuch a refined and complicated ſyſtem of fraud, as the Chriſtian Religion muſt have been if it was not true. There are, beſides, the ſtrongeſt marks of fairneſs, candour, ſimplicity, and truth throughout the whole of their narratives. Their greateſt enemies have never attempted to throw the leaſt ſtain upon their characters; and how then, can they be ſuppoſed capable of ſo groſs

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an impoſition as that of aſſerting and propagating the moſt impudent fiction? They could gain by it neither pleaſure, profit, nor power. On the contrary, it brought upon them the moſt dreadful evils, and even death itſelf. If, therefore, they were cheats, they were cheats without any motive, and without any advantage; nay, contrary to every motive and every advantage that uſually influence the actions of men. They preached a religion which forbids falſehood under pain of eternal puniſhment, and yet, on this ſuppoſition, they ſupported that religion by falſehood; and whilſt they were guilty of the baſeſt and moſt uſeleſs knavery themſelves, they were taking infinite pains, and going through the greateſt labour and ſufferings, in order to teach honeſty to all mankind.

Is this credible? Is this poſſible? Is not

this a mode of acting ſo contrary to all experience, to all the principles of human nature, and to all the uſual motives of human conduct, as to exceed the utmoſt bounds of belief, and to compel every reaſonable man to reject at once ſo monſtrous a ſuppoſition?

THE facts, therefore, related in the Goſpels, and in the Acts of the Apoſtles, even thoſe evidently miraculous, *muſt* be true; for the teſtimony of thoſe who *die* for what they aſſert, is evidence ſufficient to ſupport *any* miracle whatever. And this opinion of their veracity is ſtrongly confirmed by the following conſiderations.

THERE are, in all the ſacred writings of the New Teſtament, continual alluſions and references to things, perſons, places, manners, cuſtoms and opinions, which are found to be perfectly conformable to the real ſtate of things,

at that time, as repreſented by diſintereſted and contemporary writers. Had their ſtory been a forgery, they would certainly have been detected in ſome miſtake or other concerning theſe incidental circumſtances, which yet they have never once been.

THEN, as to the facts themſelves which they relate, great numbers of them are mentioned and admitted both by Jewiſh and Roman hiſtorians; ſuch as the ſtar that appeared at our Saviour's birth, the journey of the wiſe men to Bethlehem, Herod's murder of the infants under two years old, many particulars concerning John the Baptiſt and Herod, the crucifixion of our Lord under Pontius Pilate, and the earthquake and miraculous darkneſs which attended it. Nay, even many of the miracles which Jeſus himſelf wrought, particularly the curing the lame and blind, and caſting out de-

vils, are, as to the *matters of fact*, expreſsly owned and admitted by ſeveral of the earlieſt and moſt implacable enemies of Chriſtianity. For though they aſcribed theſe miracles to the aſſiſtance of evil ſpirits, yet they allowed that the miracles themſelves were actually wrought. *

THIS teſtimony of our adverſaries, even to the miraculous parts of the ſacred hiſtory, is the ſtrongeſt poſſible confirmation of the truth and authority of the whole.

IT is alſo certain, that the books of the New Teſtament have come down to the preſent times without any material alteration or corruption; and that they are, in all eſſential points, the ſame as they came from the hands of their authors.

THAT

* Clarke's Evidences of Nat. and Rev. Religion.

THAT in the various tranſcripts of theſe writings, as in all other antient books, a few letters, ſyllables, or even words, may have been changed, we do not pretend to deny; but that there has been any deſigned or fraudulent corruption of any conſiderable part, eſpecially of any doctrine, or any important paſſage of hiſtory, no one has ever attempted, or been able, to prove. Indeed it was abſolutely impoſſible. There can be no doubt but that, as ſoon as any of the original writings came out of the hands of their authors, great numbers of copies were immediately taken, and ſent to all the different chriſtian churches. We know that they were publicly read in the religious aſſemblies of the firſt Chriſtians. We know, alſo, that they were very ſoon tranſlated into a variety of foreign languages, and theſe antient verſions (many of which ſtill remain) were quickly diſperſed into all parts of the known world;

nay even ſeveral of the original manuſcripts remained to the time of Tertullian, at the end of the ſecond century. * There are numberleſs quotations from every part of the New Teſtament by Chriſtian writers, from the earlieſt ages down to the preſent, all which ſubſtantially agree with the preſent text of the ſacred writings. Beſides which, a variety of ſects and hereſies ſoon aroſe in the Chriſtian Church, and each of theſe appealed to the Scriptures for the truth of their doctrines. It would, therefore, have been utterly impoſſible for any one ſect to have made any material alteration in the ſacred books, without being immediately detected and expoſed by all the others. † Their mutual jealouſy and ſuſpicion of each other would effectually prevent any groſs adulteration of the ſacred volumes; and with reſpect to leſſer matters, the beſt and moſt able critics have, after the

* Grotius de Ver. l. 3. ſ. 2.

† Beattie, vol. 1. p. 188.

the moſt minute examination, aſſerted and proved, that the holy ſcriptures of the New Teſtament have ſuffered leſs from the injury of time, and the errors of tranſcribers, than any other antient writings whatſoever*.

* The ſtyle, too, of the Goſpel, (ſays the amiable and elegant author of the Minſtrel) bears intrinſic evidence of its truth. We find there no appearance of artifice or of party ſpirit; no attempt to exaggerate on the one hand, or depreciate on the other; no remarks thrown in to anticipate objections; nothing of that caution which never fails to diſtinguiſh the teſtimony of thoſe who are conſcious of impoſture; no endeavour to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative: all is fair, candid, and ſimple. The hiſtorians make no reflections of their own, but confine themſelves to matter of fact, that is, to what they heard and ſaw; and honeſtly record their own miſtakes and faults, as well as the other particulars of the ſtory. *Beattie's Evidences. v. 1. p. 89.*

PROPOSITION IV.

THE SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, WHICH ARE CONNECTED WITH THOSE OF THE NEW, ARE THE GENUINE WRITINGS OF THOSE WHOSE NAMES THEY BEAR, AND GIVE A TRUE ACCOUNT OF THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION, AS WELL AS OF THE HISTORICAL FACTS, THE DIVINE COMMANDS, THE MORAL PRECEPTS, AND THE PROPHECIES WHICH THEY CONTAIN.

THAT part of the Bible, which is called the Old Teſtament, contains a great variety of very different compoſitions, ſome hiſtorical, ſome poetical, ſome moral and preceptive, ſome prophetical; written at different times, and by different perſons, and collected into one volume by the care of the Jews.

THAT

THAT theſe books were all written by thoſe whoſe names they bear, there is not the leaſt reaſonable ground to doubt; they have been always conſidered as the writings of thoſe perſons by the whole Jewiſh nation (who were moſt intereſted in their authenticity, and moſt likely to know the truth), from the earlieſt times down to the preſent: and no proof to the contrary has ever yet been produced.

THAT theſe writings have come down to us in the ſame ſtate in which they were originally written, as to all eſſential points, there is every reaſon to believe. The original manuſcripts were long preſerved among the Jews. A copy of the book of the law was preſerved in the ark; it was ordered to be read publicly every ſeven years, at the feaſt of the tabernacles, as well as privately, and frequently, in every Jewiſh family.

THERE is a copy ſtill extant, of the five books of Moſes (which are called the Pentateuch), taken by the Samaritans, who were bitter enemies to the Jews, and always at variance with them; and this copy agrees, in every material inſtance, with the Jewiſh copy.

NEAR three hundred years before Chriſt, theſe ſcriptures were tranſlated into Greek, and this verſion (called the Septuagint) agrees alſo in all eſſential articles with the Hebrew original. This being very widely ſpread over the world, rendered any conſiderable alteration extremely difficult: and the diſperſion of the Jews into all the different regions of the globe, made it next to impoſſible.

THE Jews were always remarkable for being moſt faithful guardians of their ſacred books,

books, which they tranſcribed repeatedly, and compared moſt carefully with the originals, and of which they even numbered the words and letters. That they have not corrupted any of their prophetical writings appears from hence; that we prove Jeſus to be the Meſſiah from many of thoſe very prophecies which they have themſelves preſerved; and which (if their invincible fidelity to their ſacred books had not reſtrained them) their hatred to Chriſtianity would have led them to alter or to ſuppreſs. And their credit is ſtill further eſtabliſhed by this circumſtance, that our Saviour, though he brings many heavy charges againſt the Scribes and Phariſees, yet never once accuſes them of corrupting or falſifying any one of their ſacred writings.

It is no leſs certain that theſe writings give a true and faithful account of the various matters which they contain. Many of the prin-

cipal facts and circumſtances related in them, are mentioned by the moſt antient heathen authors. The firſt origin and creation of the world out of chaos, as deſcribed by Moſes; the formation of the ſun, the moon, and the ſtars, and afterwards of man himſelf; the dominion given him over other animals; the completion of this great work in ſix days; the deſtruction of the world by a deluge; the circumſtances of the ark and the dove; the puniſhment of Sodom by fire; the antient rite of circumciſion; many particulars relating to Moſes, the giving of the law, and the Jewiſh ritual; the names of David and Solomon, and their leagues with the Tyrians; theſe things and many others of the ſame ſort, are expreſsly mentioned, or plainly alluded to, in ſeveral Pagan authors of the higheſt antiquity and the beſt credit. And a very bitter enemy of the Jews as well as Chriſtians, the Emperor Julian,

ſian, is, by the force of evidence, compelled to confeſs, that there were many perſons among the Jews divinely inſpired; and that fire from heaven deſcended on the ſacrifices of Moſes and Elijah. Add to this, that the references made to the Books of the Old Teſtament, and the paſſages quoted from them by our Saviour and his apoſtles, is a plain proof, that they acknowledged the authority of thoſe writings, and the veracity of their authors.

It is true, indeed, that in the hiſtorical books of the Old Teſtament, there are ſome bad characters and bad actions recorded, and ſome very cruel deeds deſcribed; but theſe things are mentioned as mere hiſtorical facts, and by no means approved or propoſed as examples to others. And excepting theſe paſſages, which are comparatively few in number, the reſt of thoſe ſacred books, more eſpecially Deuteronomy,

nomy, the Pſalms, Proverbs, Eccleſiaſtes, and the Prophets, are full of very ſublime repreſentations of God and his attributes; of very excellent rules for the conduct of life, and examples of almoſt every virtue that can adorn human nature. And theſe things were written at a time when all the reſt of the world, even the wiſeſt, and moſt learned, and moſt celebrated nations of the earth, were ſunk in the groſſeſt ignorance of God and religion; were worſhipping idols and brute beaſts, and indulging themſelves in the moſt abominable vices. It is a moſt ſingular circumſtance, that a people in a remote, obſcure corner of the world, very inferior to ſeveral heathen nations in learning, in philoſophy, in genius, in ſcience, and all the polite arts, ſhould yet be ſo infinitely their ſuperiors in their ideas of the Supreme Being, and in every thing relating to morality and religion. This can no otherwiſe be accounted

counted for, than on the ſuppoſition of their having been inſtructed in theſe things by God himſelf, or by perſons commiſſioned and inſpired by him; that is, of their having been really favoured with thoſe divine revelations, which are recorded in the books of the Old Teſtament.

WITH reſpect to the prophecies which they contain, the truth of a great part of theſe has been infallibly proved by the exact fulfilment of them in ſubſequent ages, ſuch as thoſe relating to our Saviour (which will be hereafter ſpecified) to Babylon, to Egypt, to Edom, to Tyre and Sidon. But thoſe which refer more particularly to the diſperſion of the Jews are ſo very numerous and clear, and the accompliſhment of them, in the preſent ſtate of the Jews, is a fact which obtrudes itſelf, at this moment, ſo irreſiſtibly upon our ſenſes, that I cannot forbear preſenting

ſenting to the reader ſome of the moſt remarkable of thoſe predictions, as they are drawn together by a moſt able writer.

It was foretold by Moſes, that when the Jews forſook the true God, "they ſhould be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, ſhould be ſcattered among the heathen, among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; ſhould become an aſtoniſhment, a proverb, and a bye-word, among all nations; and that among thoſe nations they ſhould find no eaſe, neither ſhould the ſole of their foot have reſt; but the Lord ſhould give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and ſorrow of mind, and ſend a faintneſs into their hearts in the land of their enemies; ſo that the ſound of a ſhaken leaf ſhould chaſe them."*

The

* Deut. 28. 25; Lev. 26. 33; Deut. 4. 27; Deut. 28. 64; Deut. 28. 37; Deut. 28. 65; Lev. 26. 36.

The ſame things are continually predicted through all the following prophets: "That God would diſperſe them through the countries of the heathen; that he would ſift them among all nations, like as corn is ſifted in a ſieve; that in all the kingdoms of the earth, whither they ſhould be driven, they ſhould be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curſe, and an aſtoniſhment and a hiſſing; and that they ſhould abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a ſacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim."*

HAD any thing like this, in the time of Moſes or of the Prophets, ever happened to any nation, in the world? Or was there in nature any probability that any ſuch thing ſhould ever happen

* Ezek. 20. 13; 11, 15.; Amos, 9. 9.; Jer. 24. 9; 29. 18.; Hoſea, 3. 4.

pen to any people? That when they were conquered by their enemies, and led into captivity, they ſhould neither continue in the place of their captivity, nor be ſwallowed up and loſt among their conquerors, but be ſcattered among all the nations of the world, and hated and perſecuted by all nations for many ages, and yet continue a diſtinct people? Or could any deſcription of the Jews, written at this day, be a more exact and lively picture of the ſtate they have now been in for many ages, than theſe prophetic deſcriptions, eſpecially that of Moſes, given more than 3,000 years ago? *

* Clarke's Evidences, p. 176, 277.

PROPOSITION V.

THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST, AS REPRESENTED IN THE GOSPELS, AFFORDS VERY STRONG GROUND FOR BELIEVING THAT HE WAS A DIVINE PERSON.

WHOEVER conſiders with attention the character of our bleſſed Lord, as it may be collected from the various incidents and actions of his life (for there are no laboured deſcriptions of it, no encomiums upon it, by his own diſciples) will ſoon diſcover that it was, in every reſpect, the moſt perfect that ever was made known to mankind. If we only ſay of him what even Pilate ſaid of him, and what his bittereſt enemies cannot and do not deny, *that we can find no fault in him*, and that the whole tenor of his life was entirely blameleſs throughout, this

this is more than can be ſaid of any other perſon that ever came into the world. But this is going a very little way indeed in the excellence of his character. He was not only free from every failing, but poſſeſſed and practiſed every imaginable virtue. Towards his heavenly father he expreſſed the moſt ardent love, the moſt fervent yet rational devotion, and diſplayed in his whole conduct the moſt abſolute reſignation to his will and obedience to his commands. His manners were gentle, mild, condeſcending, and gracious: his heart overflowed with kindneſs, compaſſion, and tenderneſs to the whole human race. The great employment of his life was to do good to the bodies and ſouls of men. In this all his thoughts and all his time were conſtantly and almoſt inceſſantly occupied. He went about diſpenſing his bleſſings to all around him in a thouſand different ways; healing diſeaſes, relieving infirmities, correcting errors, removing

prejudices,

prejudices, promoting piety, juſtice, charity, peace, harmony, among men, and crowding into the narrow compaſs of his miniſtry more acts of mercy and compaſſion than the longeſt life of the moſt benevolent man upon earth ever yet produced. Over his own paſſions he had obtained the moſt complete command; and though his patience was continually put to the ſevereſt trials, yet he was never once overcome, never once betrayed into any intemperance or exceſs in word or deed, "never once ſpake unadviſedly with his lips." He endured the cruelleſt inſults from his enemies with the utmoſt compoſure, meekneſs, patience, and reſignation; diſplayed the moſt aſtoniſhing fortitude under a moſt painful and ignominious death; and, to crown all, in the very midſt of his torments on the croſs, implored forgiveneſs for his murderers in that divinely charitable prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

NOR was his wiſdom inferior to his virtues. The doctrines he taught were the moſt ſublime and the moſt important that were ever before delivered to mankind, and every way worthy of that God, from whom he profeſſed to derive them, and whoſe ſon he declared himſelf to be.

HIS precepts inculcated the pureſt and moſt perfect morality; his diſcourſes were full of dignity and wiſdom, yet intelligible and clear; his parables conveyed inſtruction in the moſt pleaſing, familiar, and impreſſive manner; and his anſwers to the many inſidious queſtions that were put to him, ſhewed uncommon quickneſs of conception, ſoundneſs of judgment, and preſence of mind, completely baffled all the artifices and malice of his enemies, and enabled him to elude all the ſnares that were laid for him. It appears then, even from this ſhort and imperfect ſketch of our Saviour's character, that he was, beyond compariſon, the wiſeſt and moſt

virtuous

virtuous perſon that ever appeared; and even his bittereſt enemies allow that he was ſo. If, then, he was confeſſedly ſo great and ſo good a man, it unavoidably follows that he muſt be, what he pretended to be, a divine perſon, and of courſe his religion alſo muſt be divine; for he certainly laid claim to a divine original. He aſſerted, that he was the ſon of God; that he and his religion came from heaven; and that he had the power of working miracles. If this was not the caſe, he muſt, in a matter of infinite importance, have aſſerted what had no foundation in truth. But is ſuch a ſuppoſition as this in the ſmalleſt degree credible? Is it probable, is it conceivable, is it conſiſtent with the general conduct of man, is it reconcileable with the acknowledged character of our Lord, to ſuppoſe, that any thing *but* truth could proceed from him whom his very enemies allow to have been in *every* reſpect (and of courſe in point of veracity) the beſt and moſt virtuous of men?

Was

Was it ever known, is there a ſingle inſtance to be produced in the hiſtory of mankind, of any one ſo unblemiſhed in morals as Chriſt confeſſedly was, perſiſting for ſo great a length of time as he did in aſſertions, which, if untrue, would be repugnant to the cleareſt principles of morality, and moſt fatal in their conſequences to thoſe he loved beſt, his followers and his friends? Is it poſſible, that the pure, the upright, the pious, the devout, the meek, the gentle, the humane, the merciful Jeſus, could engage multitudes of innocent and virtuous people in the belief and ſupport of a religion which he knew muſt draw on them perſecution, miſery and death, unleſs he had been authorized by God himſelf to eſtabliſh that religion; and unleſs he was conſcious that he poſſeſſed the power of amply recompenſing thoſe who preferred his religion to every other conſideration? The common ſenſe and common feelings of mankind muſt revolt at ſuch a preposterous idea.

It follows, then, that Chriſt was, in truth, a divine teacher, and his religion the gift of God.

PROPOSITION VI.

THE SUBLIMITY OF OUR LORD'S DOCTRINES AND THE PURITY OF HIS MORAL PRECEPTS, CONFIRM THE BELIEF OF HIS DIVINE MISSION.

THERE is no where to be found ſuch important information, and ſuch juſt and noble ſentiments concerning God and Religion, as in the Scriptures of the New Teſtament.

They teach us, in the firſt place, that there is one Almighty Being, who created all things,

of infinite power, wiſdom, juſtice, mercy, goodneſs; that he is the governor and preſerver of this world, which he has made; that his providential care is over all his works; and that he more particularly regards the affairs and conduct of men. They teach us, that we are to worſhip this great Being in ſpirit and in truth; and that the love of him is the firſt and great commandment, the ſource and ſpring of all virtue. They teach us, more particularly, how to pray to him, and for that purpoſe ſupply us with a form of prayer, called the Lord's Prayer, "which is a model of calm and rational devotion, and which, for its conciſeneſs, its clearneſs, its ſuitableneſs to every condition, and for the weight, ſolemnity, and real importance of its petitions, is without an equal or a rival."* They teach us, moreover, what we all feel to be true, that the human heart is weak and corrupt; that man

* Paley.

man is fallen from his original innocence; that he is reſtored, however, to the favour of God, and the capacity of happineſs, by the death and mediation and atonement of Chriſt, who is the way, the truth, and the life; and that he will be aſſiſted in his ſincere, though imperfect, endeavours after holineſs, by the influence of God's holy ſpirit.

THEY aſſure us, in fine, that the ſoul does not periſh with the body, but ſhall paſs, after death, into another world; that all mankind ſhall riſe from the grave, and ſtand before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, who ſhall reward the virtuous, and puniſh the wicked, in a future and eternal ſtate of exiſtence, according to their deſerts.

THESE are great, and intereſting, and momentous truths, either wholly unknown, or but very imperfectly known to the world before;

and they render the meaneſt peaſant in this country better acquainted with the nature of the Supreme Being, and the relation in which we ſtand to him, than were any of the greateſt ſages of antient times.

EQUALLY excellent, and ſuperior to all other rules of life, are the moral precepts of the Goſpel.

OUR divine Maſter, in the firſt place, laid down two great leading principles for our conduct, love to God, and love to mankind; and thence deduced (as occaſions offered, and incidents occurred, which gave peculiar force and energy to his inſtructions) all the principal duties towards God, our neighbour, and ourſelves.

WITH reſpect to God, we are commanded to love, fear, worſhip, and obey him; to ſet him always before us; to do all things to his glory; to ſeek firſt his kingdom and his righteouſneſs; to reſign

reſign ourſelves wholly to his pleaſure, and ſubmit, with patience, cheerfulneſs, and reſignation, to every thing he thinks fit to bring upon us.

WITH regard to our neighbour, we are to exerciſe towards him the duties of charity, juſtice, equity, and truth; we are to love him as ourſelves, and to do unto all men as we would they ſhould do unto us; a moſt admirable rule, which comprehends the ſum and ſubſtance of all ſocial virtue, and which no man can miſtake.

AS to thoſe duties which concern ourſelves, we are commanded to keep ourſelves unſpotted from the world, to be temperate in all things, to keep under our body, and bring it into ſubjection, to preſerve an abſolute command over all our paſſions, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.

THESE are the general directions given for our conduct in the various ſituations and relations of life. More particular injunctions are given in various parts of Scripture, eſpecially in our Saviour's admirable ſermon from the mount, where we find a multitude of moſt excellent rules of life, ſhort, ſententious, ſolemn and important, full of wiſdom and dignity, yet intelligible and clear. But the principal excellence of the goſpel morality, and that which gives it an infinite ſuperiority over all other moral inſtructions, is this; that it prefers a meek, yielding, complying, forgiving temper, to that violent, overbearing, inflexible, imperious diſpoſition, which prevails ſo much in the world; that it regulates not merely our actions, but our affections and our inclinations; and places the check to licentiouſneſs exactly where it ought to be, that is, on the heart; that it forbids us to covet the praiſe of men in our devotions,

votions, our alms, and all our other virtues; that it gives leading rules and principles for all the relative duties of life: of huſbands and wives, of parents and children, of maſters and ſervants, of Chriſtian teachers and their diſciples, of governors and ſubjects; that it commands us to be, as it were, lights in the world, and examples of good to all; to injure no man, but to bear injuries patiently; never to ſeek revenge, but return good for evil: to love our very enemies, and to forgive others as we hope to be forgiven; to raiſe our thoughts and views above the preſent life, and to fix our affections principally on that which is to come.

BUT beſides all this, the *manner* in which our Lord delivered all his doctrines and all his precepts; the conciſe, ſententious, ſolemn, weighty maxims into which he generally compreſſed them; the eaſy, familiar, natural, pa-

thetic parables in which he ſometimes cloathed them; that divine authority, and thoſe awful ſanctions with which he enforced them; theſe circumſtances give a weight, and dignity, and importance to the precepts of Holy Writ, which no other moral rules can boaſt.

If now we aſk, as it is very natural to aſk, who that extraordinary perſon could be, that was the author of ſuch uncommonly excellent morality as this? the anſwer is, that he was, to all outward appearance, the reputed ſon of a carpenter, living with his father and mother in a remote and obſcure corner of the world, 'till the time that he aſſumed his public character. "Whence then, had this man theſe things, and what wiſdom is this that was given unto him?" He had evidently none of the uſual means or opportunities of cultivating his underſtanding or improving his mind. He was born

born in a low and indigent condition, without education, without learning, without any antient ſtores from whence to draw his wiſdom and his morality, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. You may, perhaps, in ſome of the Greek or Roman writers, pick out a few of his precepts, or ſomething like them. But what does this avail? Thoſe writers he had never read. He had never ſtudied at Athens or at Rome; he had no knowledge of orators or philoſophers. He underſtood, probably, no language but his own, and had nothing to give him juſter notions of virtue and religion than the reſt of his countrymen and perſons in his humble rank of life uſually had. His fellow-labourers in this undertaking, the perſons who aſſiſted him during his life, and into whoſe hands his religion came after his death, were a few fiſhermen on the Lake of Tiberias, as unlearned and uneducated, and, for the purpoſe

of framing rules of morality, as unpromiſing as himſelf. Is it poſſible, then, that ſuch men as theſe could, without any aſſiſtance whatever, produce ſuch perfect and incomparable rules of life as thoſe of the goſpel; ſo greatly ſuperior in purity, ſolidity, perſpicuity, and univerſal uſefulneſs, to all the moral leſſons of all the philoſophers upon earth put together? Every man of common ſenſe muſt ſee that this is abſolutely impoſſible; and that there is no other conceivable way of accounting for this, than by admitting what theſe perſons conſtantly affirmed, that their doctrines and their precepts came from the fountain of all perfection, that is from God himſelf.

PROPOSITION VII.

THE RAPID AND SUCCESSFUL PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL BY THE FIRST TEACHERS OF IT, THROUGH A LARGE PART OF THE WORLD, IS A PROOF THAT THEY WERE FAVOURED WITH DIVINE ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT.

WE find in the Acts of the Apoſtles, and in their Epiſtles, that the number of converts to the Chriſtian Religion began to encreaſe conſiderably, almoſt immediately after our Saviour's aſcenſion, and continued encreaſing to an aſtoniſhing degree through every age 'till the final eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity by Conſtantine. The firſt aſſembly which we meet with of Chriſt's diſciples, and that a few days after his removal from the world, conſiſted

of 120.* About a week after this, 3000 were added in one day †; and the number of Chriſtians publickly baptized, and publickly aſſociating together, were very ſoon encreaſed to 5000. ‡ In a few years after this, the converts were deſcribed as encreaſing in great numbers, in great multitudes, and even in myriads, tens of thouſands §: and multitudes both of men and women continued to be added daily; ſo that within about thirty years after our Lord's death, the goſpel was ſpread, not only throughout almoſt all parts of the Roman Empire, but even to Parthia and India. It appears from the Epiſtles written to ſeveral churches by the Apoſtles, that there were large congregations of Chriſtians, both at Rome and in all the principal cities of Greece and Aſia. This account is confirmed by contemporary Roman hiſtorians; and Pliny, about eighty years

* Acts i. 15. † Acts ii. 41.
‡ Acts iv. 4. § Acts xxi. 20.

years after the Aſcenſion, complains that this *ſuperſtition**, as he calls it, had ſeized not cities only, but the leſſer towns alſo, and the open country; that the Pagan temples were almoſt deſerted, the ſacred ſolemnities ſuſpended, and ſcarce any purchaſers to be found for the victims. About twenty years after this, Juſtin Martyr, a Chriſtian writer, declares, that there was no nation of men, whether Greeks or barbarians, not excepting even thoſe ſavages that wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learned to offer prayers and thankſgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jeſus, who was crucified. And thus the Church of Chriſt went on encreaſing more and more, till, under Conſtantine, the empire became Chriſtian; at which time there is every reaſon

* The very name by which *modern Pagans*, as well as their predeceſſors, the antient Heathens, deſcribe the Chriſtian Religion.

reaſon to believe that the Chriſtians were more numerous and more powerful than the Pagans.

In what manner, now, can we account for this wonderful and unexampled progreſs of the Chriſtian Religion?

If this religion had ſet out with flattering the corrupt paſſions of mankind, and held up to them the proſpect of power, wealth, rank, or pleaſure, as the rewards of their converſion; if it had ſoothed their vices, humoured their prejudices, and encouraged their antient ſuperſtitions; if the perſons who taught it had been men of brilliant talents, or commanding eloquence; if they had firſt propoſed it in times of darkneſs and ignorance, and among ſavage and barbarous nations; if they had been ſeconded by all the influence and authority of the great potentates of the earth, or propagated their doctrines

doctrines at the head of a victorious army, one might have ſeen ſome reaſon for their extraordinary ſucceſs.

But it is well known that the very reverſe of all this was the real truth of the caſe. It is well known, that the firſt preachers of the Goſpel declared open war againſt all the follies, the vices, the intereſts, the inveterate prejudices, and favourite ſuperſtitions of the world; that they were (with few exceptions) men of no abilities, no learning, no artificial rhetoric or powers of perſuaſion; that their doctrines were promulgated in an enlightened age, and to the moſt poliſhed nations, and had all the wit and learning, and eloquence and philoſophy of the world to contend with: and that, inſtead of being aided by the authority and influence of the civil powers, they were oppoſed, and haraſſed, and perſecuted by them, even to death,

death, with the moſt unrelenting cruelty; and all thoſe who embraced their doctrines were expoſed to the ſame hardſhips and ſufferings.

Is it now credible, that, under theſe circumſtances, twelve poor illiterate fiſhermen of Galilee ſhould be able, merely by their own natural powers, to ſpread their new religion in ſo ſhort a ſpace, over ſo large a part of the then known world, without any aſſiſtance or co-operation from any quarter whatever? Did any thing of the kind ever happen in the world, before or ſince? It is plainly unprecedented and impoſſible. As, therefore, all *human* means of ſucceſs were againſt them, what elſe but *ſupernatural* means were left for them? It is clear almoſt to demonſtration, that they muſt have been endowed with thoſe miraculous powers, and favoured with that divine aſſiſtance to which they pretended, and which of courſe proved them to be the meſſengers of Heaven.

PROPOSITION VIII.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN CHRIST AND MAHOMET, AND THEIR RESPECTIVE RELIGIONS, LEAD US TO CONCLUDE, THAT AS THE RELIGION OF THE LATTER IS CONFESSEDLY THE INVENTION OF MAN, THAT OF THE FORMER IS DERIVED FROM GOD.

THERE is a religion in the world, called the Mahometan, which is profeſſed in one part of Europe, and moſt parts of Aſia and Africa. The founder of this religion, Mahomet, pretended to be a prophet ſent from God; but it is univerſally allowed, by all who are not Mahometans, and who have ſearched very carefully into the pretenſions of this teacher, that he was an enthuſiaſt and an impoſtor, and that his religion was a contrivance of his own. Even thoſe

thoſe perſons who reject Chriſtianity, do not think Mahometaniſm to be true; nor do we ever hear of a Deiſt embracing it from conviction.

HERE, then, we have two religions co-exiſting together in the world, and both pretending to be revelations from Heaven; one of theſe we know to be a fraud, the other we affirm and believe to be true. If this be ſo, upon comparing them and their authors together, we may expect to find a moſt marked and eſſential difference between them, ſuch a difference as may naturally be ſuppoſed to exiſt between an impoſtor and a divine teacher, between truth and falſehood. And this, I apprehend, will appear to be actually the caſe with reſpect to Chriſt and Mahomet, and their reſpective religions.

MAHOMET was a man of conſiderable rank in

in his own country; he was the grandſon of a man of the moſt powerful and honourable family in Mecca, and, though not born to a great fortune, he ſoon acquired one by marriage. Theſe circumſtances would of themſelves, without any ſupernatural aſſiſtance, greatly contribute to the ſucceſs of his religion. A perſon conſiderable by his wealth, of high deſcent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, taking upon himſelf the character of a religious teacher in an age of ignorance and barbariſm, could not fail of attracting attention and followers.

CHRIST did not poſſeſs theſe advantages of rank and wealth, and powerful connections. He was born of parents in a very mean condition of life. His relations and friends were all in the ſame humble ſituation; he was bred up in poverty, and continued in it all his life, having frequently no place where he could lay his head. A man ſo circumſtanced was not likely,

by

by his own perſonal influence, to force a new religion, much leſs a falſe one, upon the world.

MAHOMET indulged himſelf in the groſſeſt pleaſures. He perpetually tranſgreſſed even thoſe licentious rules which he had preſcribed to himſelf. He made uſe of the power he had acquired, to gratify his paſſions without control, and he laid claim to a ſpecial permiſſion from heaven to riot in the moſt unlimitted ſenſuality.

JESUS, on the contrary, preſerved throughout life the moſt unblemiſhed purity and ſanctity of manners. He did no ſin, but was perfectly holy and undefiled. Not the leaſt ſtain was ever thrown on his moral character by his bittereſt enemies.

MAHOMET was violent, impetuous, and ſanguinary.

CHRIST

CHRIST was meek, gentle, benevolent, and merciful.

MAHOMET pretended to have ſecret communications with God, and with the angel Gabriel, which no other perſon ever ſaw or heard.

JESUS was repeatedly declared to be the Son of God by voices from heaven, which were plainly and diſtinctly heard and recorded by others.

THE appearance of Mahomet was not foretold by any antient prophecies, nor was there at the time any expectation of ſuch a perſon in that part of the world.

THE appearance of Chriſt upon earth was clearly and repeatedly predicted by ſeveral antient prophecies, which moſt evidently applied to him and to no other; and which were in the keeping

keeping of thoſe who were profeſſed enemies to him and his religion. And there was at the time of his birth a general expectation over all the Eaſt, that ſome great and extraordinary perſonage would then manifeſt himſelf to the world.

MAHOMET never preſumed to foretel any future events, for this plain reaſon, becauſe he could not foreſee them; and had he foretold any thing which did not come to paſs, it muſt have entirely ruined his credit with his followers.

CHRIST foretold many things which did actually come to paſs, particularly his own death and reſurrection, and the deſtruction of Jeruſalem.

MAHOMET never pretended to work miracles; on the contrary, he expreſsly diſclaimed any ſuch power, and makes ſeveral laboured

laboured and awkward apologies for not poſſeſſing it.

JESUS, we all know, worked a great number of the moſt aſtoniſhing miracles, in the open face of day, and in the ſight of great multitudes of people. He made the deaf to hear, the dumb to ſpeak, the lame to walk, the blind to ſee, and even the dead to riſe from the grave.

MAHOMET, during the firſt twelve years of his miſſion, made uſe only of argument and perſuaſion, and in conſequence of that gained very few converts. In three years he made only fourteen proſelytes, and in ſeven only eighty-three men and eighteen women.

IN the ſame ſpace of time our Saviour and his apoſtles converted thouſands and tens of thouſands, and ſpread the Chriſtian religion over a great part of Aſia.

MAHOMET told the Jews, the Chriſtians, and the Arabs, that he taught no other religion than that which was originally taught to their forefathers, by Abraham, Iſmael, Moſes, and Jeſus. This would naturally prejudice them in favour of his religion.

CHRIST preached a religion which directly oppoſed the moſt favourite opinions and prejudices of the Jews, and ſubverted, from the very foundation, the whole ſyſtem of Pagan ſuperſtition.

MAHOMET paid court to the peculiar weakneſſes and propenſities of his diſciples. In that warm climate, where all the paſſions are ardent and violent, he allowed them a liberal indulgence in ſenſual gratifications: no leſs than four wives to each of his followers, with the liberty of divorcing them thrice.*

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* Koran c. 4. p. 42. Ib. c. 2. p. 41.

In the ſame climate, and among men of the ſame ſtrong paſſions, Jeſus moſt peremptorily reſtrained all his followers from adultery, fornication, and every kind of impurity. He confined them to one wife, and forbade divorce, except for adultery only. But what was ſtill more, he required them to govern their eyes and their thoughts, and to check the very firſt riſing of any criminal deſire in the ſoul. He told them, that whoever looked upon a woman, to luſt after her, had committed adultery with her already in his heart; and he aſſured them, that none but the pure in heart ſhould ſee God. He declared open war, in ſhort, againſt all the criminal paſſions, and evil inclinations of mankind, and expreſsly required all his followers to renounce thoſe favourite ſins that did moſt eaſily beſet them; nay, even to leave father, mother, brethren, ſiſters, houſes, lands, and every thing that was moſt dear to them, and take up their croſs and follow him.

WITH the ſame view above mentioned of bribing men to embrace his religion, Mahomet promiſed to reward his followers with the delights of a moſt voluptuous paradiſe, where the objects of their affection were to be almoſt innumerable, and all of them gifted with tranſcendent beauty and eternal youth. *

CHRIST entirely precluded his diſciples from all hopes of ſenſual indulgences hereafter, aſſuring them that in heaven they ſhould neither marry nor be given in marriage, and promiſing them nothing but pure, celeſtial, ſpiritual joys, ſuch as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

BESIDES the powerful attractions of ſenſual delights, Mahomet had another ſtill more efficacious mode of producing conviction, and gaining proſelytes; and that was, force, violence, and

* Koran, c. 56. p. 413.

and arms. He propagated his religion by the ſword; and, till he made uſe of that inſtrument of converſion, the number of his proſelytes was a mere nothing. He was at once a prophet, a warrior, a general, and a conqueror. It was at the head of his armies that he preached the Koran. His religion and his conqueſts went on together; and the former never advanced one ſtep without the latter. He commanded in perſon in eight general engagements, and undertook, by himſelf and his lieutenants, fifty military enterprizes. Death or converſion was the only choice offered to idolaters, and tribute or converſion to Jews and Chriſtians.

JESUS employed no other means of converting men to his religion, but perſuaſion, argument, exhortation, miracles, and prophecies. He made uſe of no other force but the force of truth; no other ſword but the ſword of the ſpirit, that is, the word of God. He had no

arms, no legions to fight his cauſe. He was the prince of peace, and preached peace to all the world. Without power, without ſupport, without any followers but twelve poor humble men, without one circumſtance of attraction, influence, or compulſion, he triumphed over the prejudices, the learning, the religion of his country; over the antient rites, idolatry, and ſuperſtition, over the philoſophy, wiſdom, and authority of the whole Roman empire

THE great object of Mahomet was to make his followers ſoldiers, and to inſpire them with a paſſion for violence, bloodſhed, vengeance, and perſecution. He was continually exhorting them to fight for the religion of God; and, to encourage them to do ſo, he promiſed them the higheſt honours, and the richeſt rewards, in paradiſe. "They who have ſuffered for my ſake, and have been ſlain in battle, verily I

will expiate their evil deeds from them, and I will ſurely bring them into a garden watered by rivers, a reward from God, and with God is moſt excellent reward." * This duty of warring againſt infidels is frequently inculcated in the Koran, and highly magnified by the Mahomedan divines, who call the ſword *the key of heaven and hell*, and perſuade their people that the leaſt drop of blood ſpilt in the way of God, as it is called, is moſt acceptable unto him; and that the defending the territories of the Moſlems for one night, is of more avail than a faſt of two months. † It is eaſy to ſee to what a degree of fierceneſs this muſt raiſe all the furious vindictive paſſions of the ſoul, and what a horde of ſavages and barbarians it muſt let looſe upon mankind.

THE directions of Chriſt to his diſciples were of a different temper. He poſitively forbade

* Koran, ch. 3. p. 91. and c. 9. p. 242.

† Sale's Prelim. Diſſ. ſ. 11. p. 189.

bade them the uſe of any violence whatever. The ſword that was drawn by one of them in his defence he ordered to be ſheathed: "Put up thy ſword within the ſheath; they that uſe the ſword ſhall periſh by the ſword." * He would not conſent to bring down fire from Heaven on the Samaritans, who had refuſed to receive him: "The Son of man," he told them, "came not to deſtroy men's lives, but to ſave them. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Do violence to no man; reſiſt not evil. Be ye merciful, even as your Father in Heaven is merciful. Bleſſed are the merciful, for they ſhall obtain mercy." †

THE conſequence was, that the firſt followers of Mahomet were men of cruelty and violence, living by rapine, murder, and plunder. The

* Matth. xxvi. 52; John, xviii. 11.

† Luke, ix. 56; John xiv. 27; Luke, iii. 14; Matth. v. 39; Luke vi. 36; Matth. v. 7.

The firſt followers of Jeſus were men of meek, quiet, inoffenſive, peaceable manners, and in their morals irreproachable and exemplary.

If now, after comparing together the authors of the two religions we have been conſidering, we take a ſhort view of the ſacred books of thoſe religions, the Koran and the Goſpel, we ſhall find a difference no leſs ſtriking between them; no leſs ſtrongly marking the truth of the the one and the falſehood of the other.

The Koran is highly applauded, both by Mahomet himſelf and his followers, for the exquiſite beauty, purity, and elegance of the language, which they repreſent as a ſtanding miracle, greater than even that of raiſing the dead. But admitting its excellence (which yet has been queſtioned by ſeveral learned men) if beauty of ſtyle and compoſition is to be con-

ſidered as a proof of divine inſpiration, the writings of Plato and Xenophon, of Cicero and Cæſar, and a multitude of other inimitable writers in various languages, will have as juſt a claim to a miraculous origin as the Koran. But in truth, theſe graces of diction, ſo far from being a circumſtance favourable to the Koran, create a ſtrong ſuſpicion of its being a human fabrication, calculated to charm and captivate men by the arts of rhetoric and the faſcination of words, and thus draw off their attention from the futility of its matter, and the weakneſs of its pretenſions. Theſe are the artifices of fraud and falſehood. The Goſpel wants them not. It diſdains the aid of human eloquence, and depends ſolely on the force of truth and the power of God for its ſucceſs. "I came not (as St. Paul ſublimely expreſſes himſelf) with excellency of ſpeech, nor with the enticing words of man's wiſdom, but in demonſtration of the ſpirit and of power, that your

your faith might not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God." *

BUT, whatever may be the purity of the language, the matter and ſubſtance of the Koran cannot bear a moment's compariſon with that of the Goſpel. The narrative is dull, heavy, monotonous, unintereſting; loaded with endleſs repetitions, with ſenſeleſs and prepoſterous fables, with trivial, diſguſting, and even immoral precepts. Add to this, that it has very little novelty or originality to recommend it, the moſt material parts of it being borrowed from the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament or the New; and even theſe are ſo diſguiſed and deformed by paſſing through the hands of the impoſtor (who vitiates and debaſes every thing he touches), that you can hardly know them to be the ſame incidents or tranſactions that you read with ſo much delight in the Bible.

* 1 Cor. ii. 1, 4, 5.

THE Goſpel, on the contrary, is every where conciſe, ſimple, original, animated, intereſting, dignified; its precepts important, its morality perfect, its ſentiments ſublime, its views noble and comprehenſive, its ſanctions awful.

IN the Koran, Mahomet is perpetually boaſting of his own merits and atchievements, and the ſupreme excellence of his book. In the Goſpel no encomiums are beſtowed by the Evangeliſts, either on themſelves or their writings. Even the virtues of their divine Maſter are not diſtinctly ſpecified, or brought forward into a conſpicuous point of view. It is from his actions only, and his diſcourſes, not from the obſervations of his hiſtorians, that we can collect the various tranſcendent excellencies of his character. Here we plainly ſee the ſober modeſty of truth oppoſed to the oſtentatious vanity of impoſture.

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In the deſcription of future rewards and puniſhments, the Koran is minute, circumſtantial, and extravagant, both in painting the horrors of the one and the delights of the other. It deſcribes things which cannot, and ought not to be deſcribed, and enters into details too horrible, or too licentious, to be preſented to the human mind.

In the Goſpel the pains and the pleaſures of a future life are repreſented conciſely, in ſtrong, but general and indefinite terms, ſufficient to give them a powerful, but not an overwhelming, influence over the mind.

There is ſtill another, and a very material mark of diſcrimination between the Koran and the Goſpel. Mahomet ſhows throughout, the utmoſt anxiety to guard againſt objections, to account for his working no miracles, and to defend his conduct, in ſeveral inſtances, againſt

the charges which he ſuſpects may be brought againſt him. This is always the caſe with impoſture. It is always ſuſpicious, afraid of being detected, alive to every appearance of hoſtility, ſolicitous to anticipate, and eager to repel the accuſations of enemies.

TRUTH has no occaſion for ſuch precautions, and therefore never uſes them. We ſee nothing of this ſort in the Goſpel. The ſacred hiſtorians ſhow not the ſmalleſt ſolicitude, nor take the leaſt pains to obviate cavils or remove difficulties. They relate plainly and ſimply what they know to be true. They entertain no doubt of it themſelves, and ſeem to have no ſuſpicion that any one elſe can doubt it; they therefore leave the facts to ſpeak for themſelves, and ſend them unprotected into the world, to make their way (as they have done) by their own native force and incontrovertible truth.

SUCH

SUCH are the leading features of Mahomet and his religion on the one hand, and of Chriſt and his religion on the other; and never was there a ſtronger or more ſtriking contraſt ſeen than in this inſtance. They are, in ſhort, in every eſſential article, the direct oppoſites of each other. And as it is on all hands acknowledged that Mahomet was an impoſtor, it is fair to conclude that Chriſt, who was the very reverſe of Mahomet, was the reverſe of an impoſtor, that is, a real meſſenger from heaven. In Mahomet we ſee every diſtinctive mark of fraud; in Jeſus, not one of theſe is to be found; but, on the contrary, every poſſible indication and character of truth.

PROPOSITION IX.

THE PREDICTIONS DELIVERED BY THE ANCIENT PROPHETS, AND FULFILLED IN OUR SAVIOUR, SHOW THAT HE WAS THE MESSIAH EXPECTED BY THE JEWS, AND THAT HE CAME INTO THE WORLD BY DIVINE APPOINTMENT, TO BE THE GREAT DELIVERER AND REDEEMER OF MANKIND.

THE word MESSIAH ſignifies anointed; that is, a perſon appointed to ſome high ſtation, dignity, or office; becauſe originally among the eaſtern nations men ſo appointed (particularly kings, prieſts, and prophets) were anointed with oil. Hence the word Meſſiah means the perſon pre-ordained and appointed by God to be

the great deliverer of the Jewiſh nation, and the Redeemer of all mankind. The word CHRIST means the ſame thing.

Now it was foretold concerning the Meſſiah, that he ſhould come before the ſceptre departed from Judah, that is, before the Jewiſh government was deſtroyed; * and accordingly Chriſt appeared a ſhort time before the period when the Jewiſh government was totally overthrown by the Romans.

IT was foretold, that he ſhould come before the deſtruction of the ſecond temple. "The "deſire of all nations ſhall come, and I will fill "this houſe with glory, ſaith the Lord of "Hoſts; the glory of this latter houſe ſhall be "greater than of the former." † Accordingly Chriſt appeared ſome time before the deſtruction

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Haggai, ii. 7. 9.

tion of the city and the temple of Jeruſalem by the Romans.

It was foretold by the Prophet Daniel, that he ſhould come at the end of 490 years after the rebuilding of Jeruſalem, which had been laid waſte during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and that he ſhould be cut off; and that afterwards the city and ſanctuary of Jeruſalem ſhould be deſtroyed and made deſolate. * And accordingly, at what time ſoever the beginning of the 490 years can, according to any fair interpretation of the words, be fixed, the end of them will fall about the time of Chriſt's appearing: and it is well known how entirely the city and ſanctuary were deſtroyed by the Romans ſome years after he was cut off and crucified.

It was foretold, that he ſhould perform many great

* Dan. ix. 26.

great and beneficial miracles; that the eyes of the blind ſhould be open, and the ears of the deaf unſtopped; that the lame man ſhould leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb ſing;* and this we know was literally fulfilled in the miracles of Chriſt; the blind received their ſight, the lame walked, the deaf heard.

It was foretold, that he ſhould die a violent death; that he ſhould be wounded for our tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our iniquities; that the chaſtiſement of our peace ſhould be upon him; and that with his ſtripes we ſhould be healed; that God would lay on him the iniquity of us all.† All which was exactly accompliſhed in the ſufferings of Chriſt, "who died for our ſins, the Juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God."‡

It

* Iſaiah, xxxv. 5.

† Iſaiah, liii. throughout; and Dan. ix. 26.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 18.

It was foretold, that to him ſhould the gathering of the people be; and that God would give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmoſt parts of the earth for his poſſeſſion, * which was punctually fulfilled by the wonderful ſucceſs of the Goſpel, and its univerſal propagation throughout the world.

Lastly, many minuter circumſtances were told of the great Deliverer, or Redeemer, that was to come.

That he ſhould be born of a virgin; that he ſhould be of the tribe of Judah and the ſeed of David; that he ſhould be born in the town of Bethlehem; that he ſhould ride upon an aſs in humble triumph into the city of Jeruſalem; that he ſhould be a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief; that he ſhould be ſold for thirty

* Pſalm, ii. 8.

thirty pieces of ſilver; that he ſhould be ſcourged, buffeted, and ſpit upon; that he ſhould be numbered with the tranſgreſſors (that is, ſhould be crucified, as he was, between two thieves); that he ſhould have gall and vinegar given him to drink; that they who ſaw him crucified ſhould mock at him, and at his truſting in God to deliver him; that the ſoldiers ſhould caſt lots for his garments; that he ſhould make his grave with the rich; and that he ſhould riſe again without ſeeing corruption.* All theſe circumſtances, it is well known, were foretold, and, to the greateſt poſſible exactneſs, fulfilled, in the perſon of Chriſt.

WHAT now ſhall we ſay to theſe things? Here are upwards of twenty different particulars, many of them of a very extraordinary nature,

* Iſaiah, vii. 14; Mich. v. Zech. ix. 9; Iſaiah, liii. 3; Zech. xi. 12; Iſaiah, l. 6; Iſaiah, liii. 12; Pſalm lxix. 22; Pſalm xxiv. 7. 18; Iſaiah, liii. 9; Pſalm xvi. 10.

ture, which it was foretold, 700 years before our Saviour was born, would all meet in him, and which did all actually meet in his perſon. Is not this a moſt extraordinary conſideration? There are but three poſſible ſuppoſitions that can be made concerning it: either that this was a mere fortuitous coincidence, ariſing entirely from chance and accident, or that theſe prophecies were written after the events had taken place; or laſtly, that they were real predictions, delivered many years before theſe events came to paſs, and all fulfilled in Chriſt. That any one ſhould by chance hit upon ſo many things, which ſhould all prove true, and prove true concerning one and the ſame perſon, though ſeveral of them were of ſuch a nature as were unlikely to happen *ſingly*, and by far the greateſt part of which had never before happened *ſingly*, to *any perſon whatever*; this, I ſay, exceeds all bounds of credibility, and all power of conjecture or calculation.

THAT

THAT theſe prophecies were not written or delivered after the things predicted had happened is moſt certain; becauſe they are found in books which exiſted long before thoſe events came to paſs, that is, in the books of the Old Teſtament; and the Jews themſelves, the mortal enemies of Chriſt and his religion, acknowledge that theſe prophecies were in thoſe books, exactly as we now ſee them, many hundred years before Chriſt came into the world.

THE books themſelves were in their own keeping, in the keeping of our adverſaries, who would undoubtedly take effectual care that nothing favourable to Chriſt ſhould be fraudulently inſerted into them. The Jews were our librarians. The prophecies were in their cuſtody, and are read in all their copies of the Old Teſtament as well as in ours. They have made many attempts to *explain* them away, but none to queſtion their authenticity.

It remains then that theſe are all real predictions, all centering in our Saviour, and in him only, and delivered many centuries before he was born. As no one but God has the foreknowledge of events, it is from him theſe prophecies muſt have proceeded; and they ſhew, of courſe, that Chriſt was the perſon whom he had for a great length of time predetermined to ſend into the world to be the great Deliverer, Redeemer, and Saviour of mankind.

PROPOSITION X.

THE PROPHECIES DELIVERED BY OUR SAVIOUR HIMSELF, PROVE THAT HE WAS ENDUED WITH THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FUTURE EVENTS; WHICH BELONGS ONLY TO GOD AND TO THOSE INSPIRED BY HIM.

HE did very particularly, and at ſeveral different times, foretell his own death, and the circumſtances of it: that the chief prieſts and ſcribes ſhould condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles, that is, to Pilate and the Roman ſoldiers, to mock, and ſcourge, and crucify him; that he ſhould be betrayed into their hands; that Judas Iſcariot was the perſon who ſhould betray him; that all his diſciples would forſake him, and flee; and that Peter would

would particularly thrice deny him in one night. He foretold further, that he would riſe again the third day; that, after his aſcenſion, he would ſend down the Holy Ghoſt on his apoſtles, which ſhould enable them to work many miracles. He foretold, likewiſe, many particulars concerning the future ſucceſs of the Goſpel, and what ſhould happen to ſeveral of his diſciples; he foretold what oppoſition and perſecution they ſhould meet with in their preaching; he foretold what particular kind of death Peter ſhould die, and intimated that St. John ſhould live (as he did) till after the deſtruction of Jeruſalem; he foretold, that, notwithſtanding all oppoſition and perſecution, the Goſpel ſhould yet have ſuch ſucceſs as to ſpread itſelf over the world; and, laſtly, he foretold the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, with ſuch very particular and minute circumſtances, in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, the 13th of St. Mark, and the 21ſt of St. Luke, that

no

no one who reads the deſcription of that event, in the hiſtorians of thoſe times, can have the ſmalleſt doubt of our Saviour's divine foreknowledge. We have a moſt authentic, exact, and circumſtantial account of the ſiege and deſtruction of that city by the Romans, written by Joſephus, a Jewiſh and contemporary hiſtorian; and the deſcription he has given of this terrible calamity ſo perfectly correſponds with our Saviour's prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a Chriſtian, on purpoſe to illuſtrate that prediction.

THIS power of foretelling future events is a plain proof that Chriſt came from God, and was endued with this power from above.

PROPOSITION XI.

THE MIRACLES PERFORMED BY OUR LORD, DEMONSTRATE HIM TO HAVE POSSESSED DIVINE POWER.

ALTHOUGH the preceding Propoſitions contain very convincing proofs of the divine miſſion of Chriſt, and the divine authority of his religion, yet, undoubtedly, the ſtrongeſt evidence of this ariſes from the wonderful and well-atteſted miracles which he wrought from the beginning to the end of his miniſtry. He cured the moſt inveterate diſeaſes; he made the lame to walk; he opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf; he caſt out devils; he walked upon the ſea; he fed five thouſand perſons with a few ſmall loaves and fiſhes, and even raiſed the

the dead to life again. Theſe miracles were all wrought in open day, in the ſight of multitudes of witneſſes, who could not be impoſed upon in things which they ſaw plainly with their own eyes, who had an opportunity of ſcrutinizing them as much as they pleaſed, and who did actually ſcrutinize them with a moſt critical exactneſs, as appears from the very remarkable inſtance of the blind man reſtored to ſight by our Lord, in the ninth chapter of St. John, a tranſaction which I recommend very earneſtly to the attention of my readers.

It is true, that miracles being very unuſual and extraordinary facts, they require very ſtrong evidence to ſupport them; much ſtronger, it muſt be owned, than common events, that are recorded in hiſtory: and accordingly the miracles of Chriſt *have* this very ſtrong and extraordinary evidence to ſupport them; evidence ſuch

as is not to be equalled in any other inſtance, and ſuch as is fully competent to prove the reality of the greateſt miracle that ever was performed.

BESIDES a multitude of other perſons, who were eye-witneſſes to theſe miracles, and who were actually convinced and converted by them, there were twelve perſons, called apoſtles; plain, honeſt, unprejudiced men; whom our Saviour choſe to be his conſtant companions and friends, who were almoſt always about his perſon, accompanied him in his travels, heard all his diſcourſes, ſaw all his miracles, and attended him through all the different ſcenes of his life, death, and reſurrection, till the time of his aſcenſion into Heaven. Theſe perſons were perfectly capable of judging whether the works which they ſaw Jeſus perform were real miracles or not; they could tell whether a perſon whom they had

known to be blind all his life was ſuddenly reſtored to ſight by our Saviour's only ſpeaking a word or touching his eyes; they could tell whether he did actually, in open day-light, walk upon the ſea without ſinking, and without any viſible ſupport; whether a perſon called Lazarus, whom they were well acquainted with, and whom they knew to have been four days dead and buried, was raiſed to life again merely by Chriſt ſaying, *Lazarus, ariſe.*

In theſe, and other facts of this ſort, they could not poſſibly be deceived. Now theſe, and many other miracles equally aſtoniſhing, they affirm that they themſelves actually ſaw performed by our Saviour. In conſequence of this, from being Jews, and of courſe ſtrongly prejudiced againſt Chriſt and his outward appearance, which was the very reverſe of every thing they expected in their Meſſiah, they became his diſ-

ciples; and on account of their converſion, and more particularly on account of their aſſerting the truth of his miracles and his reſurrection, they endured for a long courſe of years the ſevereſt labours, hardſhips, ſufferings, and perſecution, that human nature could be expoſed to, and at laſt ſubmitted to the moſt cruel and excruciating deaths; all which they might eaſily have avoided, if they would only have ſaid that Chriſt was *not* the Son of God, that he never worked any miracles, and never roſe from the dead. Yet this they refuſed to ſay, and were content to die rather than ſay it.*

Is not this giving the ſtrongeſt proof of their ſincerity, and of the reality of Chriſt's miracles, that human nature and human teſtimony are capable

* No man ever laid down his life for the honour of Jupiter, Neptune, or Apollo; but how many thouſands have ſealed their Chriſtian teſtimony with their blood! Beattie, v. 2.

capable of giving? The concurrent and uncontradicted teſtimony of twelve ſuch witneſſes is, according to all the rules of evidence, ſufficient to eſtabliſh the truth of any one fact in the world, however extraordinary, however miraculous.

If there had been any powerful temptation thrown in the way of theſe men; if they had been bribed, like the followers of Mahomet, with ſenſual indulgencies; or, like Judas Iſcariot, with a ſum of money, one ſhould not have been much ſurpriſed at their perſiſting, for a time at leaſt, in a premeditated falſehood. But when we know that, inſtead of any of theſe allurements being held out to them, their maſter always foretold to them, and they themſelves ſoon found by experience, that they could gain nothing, and muſt loſe every thing in this world, by embracing Chriſtianity; it is utterly impoſſi-

ble to account for their embracing it on any other ground than their conviction of its truth from the miracles which they ſaw. In fact, muſt they not have been abſolutely mad to have incurred voluntarily ſo much miſery, and ſuch certain deſtruction, for affirming things to be true which they knew to be falſe; more eſpecially as their own religion taught them, that they would be puniſhed moſt ſeverely in another world, as well as in this, for ſo wicked a fraud? Is it uſual for men thus to ſport with their own happineſs, and their very lives, and to bring upon themſelves, with their eyes open, ſuch dreadful evils, without any reaſon in the world, and without the leaſt poſſible benefit, advantage, credit, or pleaſure reſulting from it? Where have you ever heard of any inſtance of this ſort? Would any twelve men you ever knew, eſpecially men of credit and character, take it into their heads to aſſert that a certain perſon in the neighbourhood raiſed

raiſed a dead man to life, when they knew that no ſuch thing had ever happened; and that they would all, with one conſent, ſuffer themſelves to be put to death rather than confeſs that they had told a lie? Such a thing never happened ſince the world began. It is contrary to all *experience* and all credibility, and would be, in itſelf, a greater miracle than any of thoſe that are recorded in the Goſpel.

It is certain then (as certain as any thing can be that depends on human teſtimony) that real miracles were wrought by Chriſt; and as no miracles can be wrought but by the power of God, it is equally certain that Chriſt and his religion drew their origin from God. *

* On the clear and evident marks of diſcrimination between the real miracles of the Goſpel and the pretended miracles of Paganiſm and of Popery, ſee Biſhop Douglas's Criterion, and Dr. Paley's moſt maſterly obſervations, in his View of the Evidences of Chriſtianity, prop. i. ch. ii. b. i. p. 329.

PROPOSITION XII.

THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD FROM THE DEAD, IS A FACT FULLY PROVED BY THE CLEAREST EVIDENCE, AND IS THE SEAL AND CONFIRMATION OF HIS DIVINITY AND OF THE TRUTH OF HIS RELIGION.

THE reſurrection of Chriſt being one of thoſe miracles which are recorded in the Goſpel, the truth of it is, in fact, already proved by what has been advanced reſpecting thoſe miracles in the preceding article. But it is an event ſo ſingular in its nature, and ſo infinitely important in its conſequences, that it well deſerves to be made the ſubject of a diſtinct Propoſition.

AFTER

AFTER our Saviour's crucifixion, Joſeph of Arimathea, we are told, laid the body in his own new tomb, hewn out of a rock, and rolled a great ſtone to the door of the ſepulchre. In order to ſecure themſelves againſt any fraud, the Jews deſired the Roman governor, Pilate, to grant them a band of ſoldiers to guard the ſepulchre, leſt, as they ſaid, the diſciples ſhould come by night and ſteal the corpſe away. Pilate's anſwer was in theſe words, "Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as ſure as you can: ſo they went and made the ſepulchre ſure, ſealing the ſtone, and ſetting a watch." * The Evangeliſt then proceeds to relate the great event of the reſurrection with that ingenuous and natural ſimplicity which characterizes the ſacred hiſtorians, and which carries upon the face of it every mark of ſincerity and truth.

* Matth. xxvii. 65, 66.

" In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the firſt day of the week, came Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, to ſee the ſepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake; for the Angel of the Lord deſcended from heaven, and rolled back the ſtone from the door, and ſate upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as ſnow. And for fear of him the keepers did ſhake, and became as dead men. And the Angel of the Lord anſwered, and ſaid unto the woman, Fear not ye; for I know that ye ſeek Jeſus that was crucified. He is not here, for he is riſen from the dead; and behold he goeth before you into Galilee, there ye ſhall ſee him. Lo! I have told you. And as they went to tell his diſciples, behold, Jeſus met them, ſaying, All hail; and they came and held him by the feet, and worſhipped him. Then ſaid Jeſus unto them, Be not afraid; go tell my brethren, that

that they go into Galilee, and there they ſhall ſee me. Now, when they were going, behold ſome of the watch came into the city, and ſhewed unto the chief prieſts all that was done. And when they were aſſembled with the elders, and had taken council, they gave large money unto the ſoldiers, ſaying, Say ye, his diſciples came by night, and ſtole him away while we ſlept; and if this come to the governor's ear, we will perſuade him and ſecure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught; and this ſaying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day."*

SUCH is the relation of this wonderful fact given by St. Matthew, which comprehends not only his own account of it, but that alſo which was circulated in oppoſition to it by the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jews. Here then we have fairly before us the two different repreſentations of

* Matth. xxviii. 1—16.

of this event by the friends and by the enemies of Chriſt; of which the former aſſerts that it was a real reſurrection, the other that it was a fraud; and between theſe two we muſt form our opinions; for no third ſtory has been ſet up, that we know of, by any one.

ONE thing is agreed on by both ſides, viz. that the body was not to be found in the ſepulchre. It was gone; and the queſtion is, by what means? The ſoldiers gave out that the diſciples "came by night, while they ſlept, and ſtole it away." But it is not very eaſy to underſtand how the ſoldiers could depoſe to any thing that paſſed while they were faſt aſleep; they could not poſſibly tell in what manner the body was ſtolen away, or by whom. Nor, conſidering the extreme ſeverity of the Roman military diſcipline, is it credible, that if they had been aſleep, they would have confeſſed it? For it was cer-

tain death to a Roman ſoldier to be found ſleeping upon guard. Nothing could have prevailed upon them to make ſuch a declaration as that, but a previous promiſe of impunity and reward from the Jewiſh rulers; a plain proof that they had been tampered with, and that it was a concerted ſtory.

In the next place, ſuppoſing the ſtory true, of what uſe could the dead body be to the diſciples? It could not prove to them, or to others, that their maſter was riſen from the dead; on the contrary, it muſt have been a ſtanding and a viſible proof of the contrary. It muſt convince them that he, inſtead of being the deliverer they expected, was an impoſtor, and they moſt cruelly deceived. And why they ſhould chuſe to keep in their poſſeſſion, and to have continually before their eyes a lifeleſs corpſe, which completely blaſted all

all their hopes, and continually reminded them of their bitter diſappointment, is ſomewhat difficult to be imagined.

THE tale then, told by the ſoldiers, is, upon the very face of it a groſs and clumſy forgery. The conſequence is, that the account given by St. Matthew is the true one. For if the body was actually gone (an acknowledged point on all ſides) and if it was not, as we have proved, ſtolen away by the diſciples, there are but two poſſible ſuppoſitions remaining; either that it was taken away by the Jews and Romans, or that it was raiſed to life again by the power of God. If the former had been the caſe, it could only have been for the purpoſe of confronting and convicting the diſciples of falſehood and fraud by the production of the dead body. But the dead body was *not* produced. It was therefore, as the Goſpel affirms, raiſed from the grave,

and

and reſtored to life. There is no other conceivable alternative left.

AND that this was actually the caſe, is proved by our Lord's appearing, after his reſurrection, not only to the two women who came firſt to the ſepulchre, but to the two diſciples going to Emmaus, and to the diſciples aſſembled together at two different times, and to all the apoſtles, and to above 500 brethren, at once. And he not only appeared to them ſilently, but he talked and ate with them; he ſhowed them his hands and his feet; he made them handle him; he held ſeveral long converſations with them; and, at laſt, aſcended up into heaven in their ſight.

THESE were things of which the plaineſt and moſt ignorant men could judge. It was impoſſible for them to be deceived in an object with which they were well acquainted, and which preſented itſelf to all their ſenſes.

BUT

BUT there is another moſt deciſive proof, ariſing from their own conduct, that they were perfectly convinced of the reality of our Lord's reſurrection.

IT appears that the apoſtles were far from being men of natural courage and firmneſs of mind. When our Lord was apprehended, all his diſciples, we are told, forſook him, and fled. Peter followed him afar off, and went into a hall in the palace of the high prieſts, where the ſervants warmed themſelves, and being there charged with being a diſciple of Jeſus, he peremptorily denied it three times with vehemence and with oaths. It does not appear that any of his diſciples attended in the judgment hall to aſſiſt or to ſupport him; and when he was crucified, the only perſons that ventured to ſtand near his croſs were his mother, and two or three other women, and St. John. They all, in ſhort, appeared diſmayed and terrified with the fate of their

their maſter, afraid to acknowledge the ſlighteſt connection with him, and utterly unable to face the dangers that ſeemed to menace them. But, immediately after the reſurrection of their Lord, a moſt aſtoniſhing change took place in their conduct. From being the moſt timid of men, they ſuddenly became courageous, undaunted, and intrepid; they boldly preached that very Jeſus whom but a ſhort time before they had deſerted in his greateſt diſtreſs; and although his crucifixion was freſh before their eyes, and they had reaſon to expect the ſame or a ſimilar fate, yet they perſiſted in avowing themſelves his diſciples, and told the Jews publicly, "that God had made that ſame Jeſus whom they had crucified both Lord and Chriſt,"* and when they were brought before the rulers and elders to be examined reſpecting the lame man whom they had cured at the gate of the temple, "Be it known unto you all (ſaid they) and to all the people,

* Acts, ii 36.

people of Iſrael, that, by the name of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, and whom God raiſed from the dead, even by him does this man ſtand here before you all. This is the ſtone that was ſet at nought of you builders, which is become the head ſtone of the corner; neither is there ſalvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we muſt be ſaved." *

And when a ſecond time they were brought before the council, and forbidden to teach in the name of Jeſus, their anſwer was, "We ought to obey God rather than man. And when they were again reprimanded, and threathened, and beaten, yet they ceaſed not in the temple, and in every houſe, to teach and to preach Jeſus Chriſt; and with great power gave the apoſtles witneſs of the reſurrection of the Lord Jeſus." †

In

* Acts, iv. 10, 11, 12.

† Acts, v. 29. 42.

—— iv. 33.

In what manner now ſhall we account for this ſudden and moſt ſingular change in the diſpoſition, and as it were in the very conſtitution, of the apoſtles? If Chriſt had not riſen from the grave, and his dead body was in the poſſeſſion of his diſciples, was this calculated to inſpire them with affection for their leader, and with courage to preach a doctrine which they knew to be falſe? Would it not, on the contrary, have increaſed their *natural timidity*, depreſſed their ſpirits, extinguiſhed all their zeal, and filled them with indignation and horror againſt a man who had ſo groſsly deceived them, and robbed them, under falſe pretences, of every thing that was dear and valuable to them in the world? Moſt unqueſtionably it would. Nor is it poſſible to account, in any rational way, for the ſtrange revolution which took place in their minds, ſo ſoon after their maſter's death, but by admitting that they were fully perſuaded and ſatisfied that he roſe alive from the grave.

It may be ſaid, perhaps, that this perſuaſion was the effect, not of irreſiſtible evidence, but of enthuſiaſm, which made them fancy that ſome viſionary phantom, created ſolely by their own heated imagination, was the real body of their Lord reſtored to life. But nothing could be more diſtant from enthuſiaſm than the character and conduct of theſe men, and the courage they manifeſted, which was perfectly calm, ſober, collected, and cool. But what completely repels this ſuſpicion is, that their bittereſt adverſaries never once accuſed them of enthuſiaſm, but charged them with a crime which was utterly inconſiſtent with it, fraud and theft; with ſtealing away the body from the grave. And if they did this, if that dead body was actually before their eyes, how was it poſſible for any degree of enthuſiaſm ſhort of madneſs (which was never alledged againſt them) to miſtake a dead body for a living man, whom they ſaw, and

and touched, and converſed with? No ſuch inſtance of enthuſiaſm ever occurred in the world.

THE reſurrection of our Lord being thus eſtabliſhed on the firmeſt grounds, it affords an unanſwerable proof of the truth of our Saviour's pretenſions, and, conſequently, of the truth of his religion: for had he not been what he aſſumed to be, the Son of God, it is impoſſible that God ſhould have raiſed him from the dead, and thereby given his ſanction to an impoſture. But as he did actually reſtore him to life, he thereby ſet his ſeal to the divinity which he claimed, and acknowledged him, in the moſt public and authoritative manner, to be "his beloved ſon, in whom he was well pleaſed." *

AND this evidence of our Lord's divine miſſion is of the more importance, becauſe our Saviour himſelf appealed to it as the grand proof of

* Matth. iii. 17.

of his being ſent from heaven to inſtruct and to redeem mankind. For when he caſt the buyers and ſellers out of the temple, and the Jews required of him a ſign, that is, a miraculous proof, that he had the authority of God for doing thoſe things, his anſwer, was "Deſtroy this temple, (meaning his body) and in three days I will raiſe it up. When, therefore, he was riſen from the dead, his diſciples remembered that he had ſaid this unto them; and they believed the ſcriptures, and the word which Jeſus had ſaid;" * and they themſelves conſtantly referred to the reſurrection, more than to any other evidence, as the great foundation on which their faith was built.

THE reaſon for this, perhaps, was, that this great event contained in itſelf, at once, the evidence both of miracle and of prophecy. It was certainly one of the moſt ſtupendous manifeſtations of divine power that could be preſented to the

* John ii. 19. 22.

the obſervation of mankind; and it was, at the ſame time, the completion of two moſt remarkable prophecies; that of our Saviour's abovementioned, and that well-known one of king David's, which St. Peter expreſsly applies to the reſurrection of Chriſt: "Thou wilt not leave my ſoul in hell, neither wilt thou ſuffer thy holy one to ſee corruption.*"

* Pſalm xvi. 10. Acts, ii. 27. On this ſubject of Chriſt's reſurrection I muſt again refer my young readers to Dr. Paley, vol. ii. ch. ix. p. 209. and alſo to the concluſion of his work; the force of which it ſeems to me ſcarce poſſible for an unprejudiced reader to withſtand.

CONCLUSION.

THESE are the principal proofs of the truth of the Chriſtian Religion. Many others of a very ſatisfactory nature might be added; but the queſtion may be ſafely reſted on thoſe that have here been ſtated.

AND when we collect them all together into one point of view; when we conſider the deplorable ignorance and inconceivable depravity of the heathen world before the birth of Chriſt, which rendered a divine interpoſition eſſentially neceſſary, and therefore highly probable; the appearance of Chriſt upon earth, at the very time when his preſence was moſt wanted, and when there was a general expectation through-

out the Eaſt, that ſome great and extraordinary perſonage was ſoon to come into the world; the tranſcendent excellence of our Lord's character, ſo infinitely beyond that of every other moral teacher; the calmneſs, the compoſure, the dignity, the integrity, the ſpotleſs ſanctity of his manners, ſo utterly inconſiſtent with every idea of enthuſiaſm or impoſture; the ſublimity and importance of his doctrines; the conſummate wiſdom and perfect purity of his moral precepts, far exceeding the natural powers of a man born in the humbleſt ſituation, and in a remote and obſcure corner of the world, without learning, education, languages, or books; the rapid and aſtoniſhing propagation of his religion, in a very ſhort ſpace of time, through almoſt every region of the Eaſt, by the ſole efforts of himſelf and a few illiterate fiſhermen, in direct oppoſition to all the power, the authority, the learning, the philoſophy, the reigning

vices, prejudices, and ſuperſtitions of the world; the complete and marked oppoſition, in every eſſential point, between the character and religion of Chriſt and the character and religion of Mahomet, exactly ſuch as might be expected between truth and falſehood; the minute deſcription of all the moſt material circumſtances of his birth, life, ſufferings, death, and reſurrection, given by the antient prophets many hundred years before he was born, and exactly fulfilled in him, and him only, pointing him out as the Meſſiah of the Jews and the Redeemer of mankind; the various prophecies delivered by Chriſt himſelf, which were all punctually accompliſhed, more eſpecially the deſtruction of Jeruſalem by the Romans; the many aſtoniſhing miracles wrought by Jeſus, in the open face of day, before thouſands of ſpectators, the reality of which is proved by multitudes of the moſt unexceptionable witneſſes, who ſealed their teſtimony

teſtimony with their blood, and was even acknowledged by the earlieſt and moſt inveterate enemies of the Goſpel; and laſtly, that moſt aſtoniſhing and well-authenticated miracle of our Lord's reſurrection, which was the ſeal and confirmation of his own Divine Origin, and that of his Religion; when all theſe various evidences are brought together, and impartially weighed, it ſeems hardly within the power of a fair and ingenuous mind to reſiſt the impreſſion of their united force. If ſuch a combination of evidence as this is not ſufficient to ſatisfy an honeſt enquirer into truth, it is utterly impoſſible that any event, which paſſed in former times, and which we did not ſee with our own eyes, can ever be proved to have happened, by any degree of teſtimony whatever. It may ſafely be affirmed, that no inſtance can be produced of any one fact or event, ſaid to have taken place in paſt ages, and eſtabliſhed by ſuch evidence as

that

that on which the Chriſtian revelation reſts, that afterwards turned out to be falſe. We challenge the enemies of our faith to bring forward, if they can, any ſuch inſtance. If they cannot (and we know it to be impoſſible) we have a right to ſay, that a religion, ſupported by ſuch an extraordinary accumulation of evidenoe, muſt be true; and that all men, who pretend to be guided by argument and by proof, are bound, by the moſt ſacred obligations, to receive the religion of Chriſt as a real revelation from God.

6 JU 62

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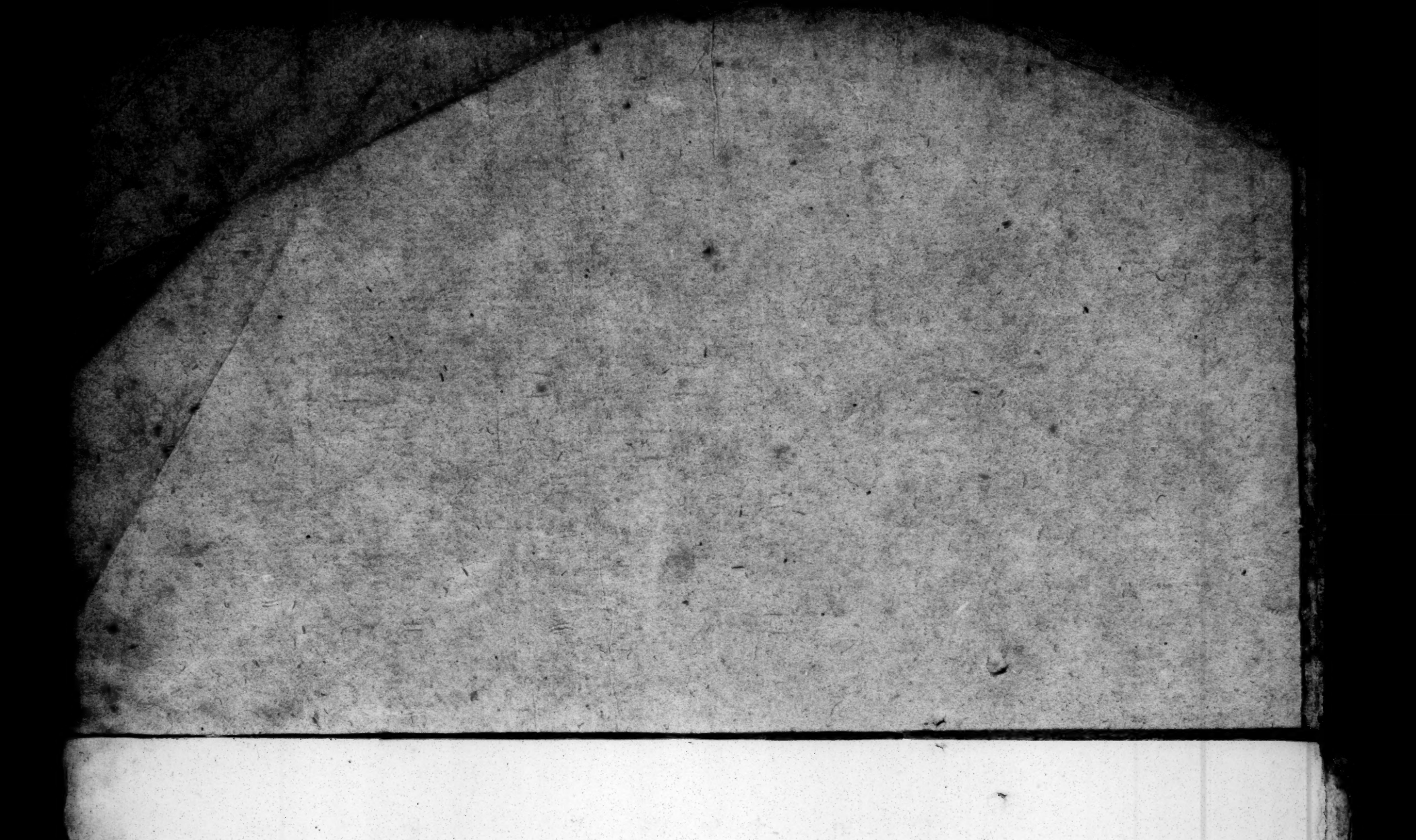
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